

Innovative Research on Mud Sculpture in the Context of Modern Cultural Industry-Taking Huaiyang Mud Dog as an Example

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Abstract:

Huaiyang mud dog (“Nini Gou”) is an intangible cultural heritage of China and an outstanding cultural product of the Huaiyang region. However, changes in modern lifestyles and aesthetic preferences have led to its gradual decline within the contemporary cultural industry. This research explores how to revitalize Huaiyang mud dog, fostering innovation in intangible cultural heritage. The aim is to develop products that align with modern aesthetics, incorporate technological advancements, break through inherent constraints, and utilize innovative design. This approach seeks to ensure the inheritance of the mud dog tradition while enriching contemporary life.

Keywords:

Folk Art, Mud Sculpture, Huaiyang Mud Dog, Development

1. Introduction

As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, the inheritance and development of non-heritage mud sculpture is of great significance to the promotion of traditional culture, so it is necessary to carry out innovative research to promote its development. The thesis selects listed in the fourth batch of national intangible cultural heritage (representative projects of traditional arts) in 2014--Huaiyang mud dog as the research object, and extracts the elements from the traditional mud sculpture works to carry out modern design. In the contemporary context, the non-heritage art inherited for thousands of years can be revitalized. Through innovative research, we can explore the new possibilities of non-heritage mud sculpture in contemporary art expression, and infuse it with the flavor of the times. Innovative research on non-heritage mud sculpture can provide new development ideas and directions for the related industries, and promote the development of non-heritage cultural industries.

Under the background of advocating national self-confidence, traditional non-heritage has also received a lot of attention, and people have transferred more attention to the folk art which has been inherited for thousands of years and has strong historical and cultural elements, and the ensuing attention to the topics of folk art, traditional handicrafts, intangible cultural heritage, etc., has also made a lot of

researchers start to carry out special research on specific folklore and folk art entities, of which the mud dog of Huaiyang is a part, and its deep historical origin has been recognized as the most important one. Huaiyang mud dog are one of these entities, and their deep historical origins, colors, shapes, and patterns corresponding to traditional Chinese concepts have triggered scholars' research. In a broader academic context, the Huaiyang mud dog are studied from the perspective of "iconology" and "semiotics", and their external appearance deeply reflects the cultural connotation of Chinese tradition.

The research objective of this paper is to analyze the stylistic features, color expression and symbolic language of the Huaiyang mud dog, which are the fourth batch of national non-legacy of traditional arts in 2014. The research includes: the origin of the shape of Huaiyang mud dog, the color connotation of Huaiyang mud dog, and the internal connotation of Huaiyang mud dog. Finally, we will try to re-create the Huaiyang mud dog with modern design, or extract the elements to form a new artistic creation.

2. Historical Origin of Huaiyang Mud Dog

The name of the mud dog varies, it is also called "Lingshou", "Tiangou", "Linggou", from the "Ling", "Tian", "heaven", "spirit" and other words in these names, we can also know that the mud dog must be related to religious rituals and myths and legends. Linggou' (Spirit Dog) is perhaps the most widely recognized alternative name to 'Nini Gou' (mud dog), signifying that the mud dog serves as the guardian dog for the Fuxi Taihao Mausoleum in Huaiyang. The earliest name can be traced back to ancient times, but the most common and widely used name is still "mud dog" [1].

The word "mud dog" consists of two characters "mud". The first character "mud" serves as a determiner and a verb, implying that "mud dog" is made by kneading with hands. the second character "mud" is used as a noun, referring to the material of the substance, mud. The last character "dog" in "Mud Dog" means the most famous animal figure in "Mud Dog", which is also the origin of its name -Dog (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The image of dog in mud mud dog.

However, this interpretation is somewhat of a conceptual understanding of the name, and according to research [2], and it is obviously insufficient to understand it in modern grammar. Coupled with the production of mud dog artists are mostly farmers, the name will not be so elaborate, and adults will rarely use the mud dog, mostly purchased at the temple fair for children to use as toys, mud dog can be blown to whistle for fun, Huaiyang, there is a famous local ballad "the old Jaigong, walk slowly, to the mud dog, your old man live to ninety-nine." And this ballad in the "old Zai Gong" is more incense burning old man, They would buy many "mud dogs" to take home [3]. Therefore, the repetition of the characters "mud" and "dog" may simply

refer to the clay used as the material and the repetition of the characters to express affection.

Mud dog modeling varied, “As noted in some sources, ‘Nini Gou’ is also known as ‘Linggou’ (Spirit Dog) or ‘Ling Shou’ (Spirit Beast), serving as a general term for the small animal figurines.” “Mud dog” although the name with the word dog, but in the series of mud toys in the mud dog does not account for the mainstream, and is not mainly realistic, is a kind of abstraction with primitive totems, deformation of the complex, a total of about 200 kinds of. Mainstream in the mud mud dog can be roughly divided into “human face monkey” type, “double-headed” type, “straw hat tiger” type, “Fuxi statue” type, “imitation animal” type. The most distinctive among them is the “straw hat tiger” (Figure 2) type, which is one of the types of “mud dog”, with a straw hat on the tiger’s head and the face as a whole in the form of a disk. The legend behind this shape is also quite interesting. According to legend, Fuxi and Nuwa were originally brother and sister, but when they got married, Nuwa used a straw hat to cover her shyness in order to hide her sibling’s shyness, and it is said that the red cap on the head of a bride getting married today is the result of this, and so is the “Straw Hat Tiger”.



Figure 2. Straw Hat Tiger.

The “mud dog” sculptures are somewhat ambiguous in appearance, derived from animals yet distinctly different. They are also influenced by material and technical limitations, resulting in rough and varied forms. Additionally, since they are often handmade by artisans, their designs are highly variable. Over time, the variety of sculptures has increased, and while the earliest forms are no longer traceable, the “straw hat tiger” can be confirmed as having existed in earlier times. Other bird sculptures, deity statues, and human figures did indeed exist in their early forms, but whether their designs align with those of today is no longer verifiable [4].

3. Huaiyang Mud Dog Art Modeling Analysis

Folk artists typically create without a strict theoretical framework. Their process relies on oral tradition and incorporates strong elements of randomness. During creation, artists integrate their own aesthetic sensibilities and infuse their work with a profound sense of local identity. The traditional modeling and changes in the times together, resulting in “mud dog” modeling varied, but are based on realism plus changes. The result is that “mud dog” has many different shapes, but all of them are based on realism and change, both abstract and realistic, so that the viewer can identify the source of the shape of the mud sculpture while feeling lively and interesting at the same time. The modeling characteristics of “mud dog” can be

roughly divided into several categories, such as composite type, native type and elf type.

3.1. Mysterious and exaggerated modeling language

Composite type is a combination of human and birds and animals, i.e., this image often gives people a novel and strange, bizarre and chic feeling. In this type of work, the free-spirited style of the “mud dog” is more evident, [5] and the artistic expressiveness of folk artists is evident. In such works, the image is completely non-existent in real life, filled with mystery and primitive roughness. Coupled with the long-standing concept of fertility worship, such mud works are often dominated by the main anthropomorphic animals plus a large number of small animals, giving people the meaning of having many children and good fortune, such as the classic “monkey with a human face”.



Figure 3. The Human-Faced Monkey

At the same time, the native type is also one of the important themes in “mud dog”, the native type by the literal meaning of the original image of the animal, we can easily capture their images, in this type of more visible “mud dog” modeling diversity in the richness, such as birds, dogs, dogs and other animals, we can see the diversity and richness of “Mud Dog” modeling, such as birds, dogs, monkeys, cats, turtles, eagles and so on.



Figure 5. Elf type.

Elf type is the embodiment of modeling and coloring in the “Mud Dog” series. Elf type tends to be more grotesque, bizarre, is the refraction of the primitive totem worship, primitive people worship of God, the elves in which the most obvious, primitive people will be its conscious worship refracted to the specific mud sculpture, so that the worship has a specific image, so the image of this kind of “mud dog” can not be found from the real life corresponds to the image of the creature in the abstract

imagination. Most of the images of these “mud dog” cannot be found in real life, and they are abstract and imaginary creatures. When the images of “gods” cannot be found in real life, the “gods” have a strong power and sense of intimidation.

4. The Color System of “Mud Dog”

In the production of “mud dog” is the local yellow rubber clay of Huaiyang, which is delicate, warm, rich in gelatin, and highly malleable, and has been used in “mud dog” since its inception. When the yellow rubber clay dries to an earth color, craftsmen will pour black pigment on it, and then take it out to dry after it is dyed black. In the early days, the color of “mud dog” was often black, but in the later days, it was gradually formed into “red”, “green”, and “white”, “yellow” plus the bottom of the black color to form five colors, it is worth mentioning that the folk artist’s coloring tool is not an ordinary pen but sharpened into a slanting sorghum rod made.

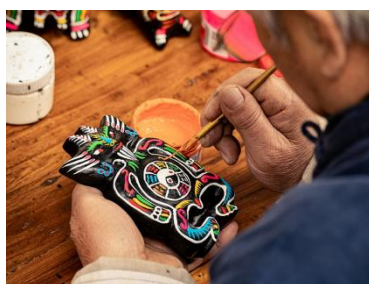


Figure 6. Traditional Coloring Process.

The black base color is said to be linked to the ancient Xia Dynasty’s reverence for black. Historical records mention ‘Xia Hou Shi Shanghei’ (The Sovereign of Xia revered black) [6]. As Huaiyang was once part of the Xia territory, the prevalence of black in mud dogs may originate from this cultural tradition. The black color of “mud dog” is said to have originated here. And its color “red”, “green”, “white”, “yellow” plus the bottom of the black total of five colors. There are a variety of discussions, one of which is that the use of the five colors is related to Fuxi, and the five colors correspond to the spring official, summer official, autumn official, winter official and the middle official appointed by Fuxi, and these five officials represent the five colors. Secondly, the author of “The Connotation of Mud Toys in Huaiyang” suggests that the mud dog is made of black color with “red”, “green”, “white” and “yellow”, which corresponds to the five colors of Fuxi. These five colors correspond to the five elements and the five gods [7]. Taken together, the five colors of black, plus red, green, white and yellow are collectively known as the five colors. The five colors are the most widely used, and are also in line with traditional Chinese culture.

However, during the author’s 17-day field trip from November 20, 2023 to December 7, 2023, the colors used in “mud dog” were not the five colors, and although the craftsmen were more or less aware of the “five colors,” they were not limited to the “five colors” in their actual drawings.” Although craftsmen know more or less about the five colors, they are not limited to the five colors in the actual drawing, and the specific color depends on the shape and size. In the production of folk artists over the years, they have worked out a set of color system that meets the aesthetic interests of “mud dog” and the people in concrete practice.

5. Artistic Innovation of Huaiyang Mud Dog

In recent years, the production process and method of “mud dog” are basically the same as before, and the modeling is also based on the traditional modeling to make some changes, the production materials, modeling, colors are more or less the same, although it is still simple and childish, vivid and interesting, but inevitably make people feel a little boring, and need to be added to the fresh elements.

5.1. Case study of the use of Huaiyang mud dog in design

Folk artisans deal with the “mud dog” by taking the yellow rubber clay from Huaiyang area, making it by hand, drying and pouring black mud tires made by kneading, and then applying color painting. Up to now, Huaiyang area still adopts the traditional production method, and the artisans engaged in the production are all elderly, so the inheritance is more than the innovation. In modern design cases, the innovation of Huaiyang “mud dog” is probably from the two aspects of modeling and color, the basic modeling has not broken through, and still strictly according to the color program of the “mud dog” itself, but only converting the “mud dog” from three-dimensional to three-dimensional. The “Mud Dog” is only converted from a three-dimensional to a flat image, and then the flat image is attached to the three-dimensional, which is innovative but not exquisite.

“Mud dog” has a long tradition, but the basic modeling has not changed much, the traditional “mud dog” should be retained, but there should be a “mud dog” internal nutrition and innovation of fresh design products. Nutrition and innovation of fresh design products, rather than a simple image transfer. “Mud dog” is interesting because of its simple and childish shape and color language, although from animals, but also with the real image of animals to go to the difference, like a person is not a person, is a kind of semi-realistic half-imaginary creatures, and its interesting point is in it.

In the innovative design of “mud dog”, the author abandoned the behavior of “copying and pasting” its plane image at the beginning, but tried to seize the characteristics of the image of “mud dog”, and put the “mud dog” in the image of the folk artist. Folk artists in which the human-animal characteristics of the combination of modeling methods, in the traditional “mud dog” modeling is often the human head of the animal God, giving a “human-like non-human” feeling, and the author in the creation of the attempt to join the human look and attitude of the animal image, this point is the author tries to add the human’s attitude into the animal image, which is drawn from the “mud dog”, and then adopts the classic elements from the “mud dog” shape to complete the design of this set of works.



Figure 7. “I Just Look at You”.

In this work, the modeling is inspired by the characteristics of the “backpack monkey” in “mud dog”, which is extracted and added to modern design elements, preserving the relationship between the big and small monkeys in the “backpack monkey”, as well as its “human face”, which adding the human look but the image seems to be completely different from that of the “Back Monkey”.

In traditional clay sculpture, the base color of the “Back Monkey” is mostly black, and then the colorful symmetrical curve patterns are drawn, but in this work, the base color is changed to white, and the patterns on the body are regular, and in the design of the patterns, the pattern of the reproduction worship, which is not in line with the spirit of the modern era, has been discarded, and the regular geometrical patterns are used instead. Moreover, unlike the handmade sense of folk art, this work is delicate and cold with a modern industrial sense.

5.2. Exploring the Innovative Path of Huaiyang mud dog

In the artistic innovation of “mud dog”, we should not stick to the old production methods and patterns, but focus on innovation. The diverse visual elements of “mud dog” have strong aesthetic value, and its shape is simple, childish and interesting. The simple, childish and interesting shape, and the bright, colorful and lively colors can all be integrated with new creative points in the context of the new era, so that a new kind of works containing new ideas but with connotations can appear in the public’s view.

In addition to the rich traditional connotation of “mud dog” art innovation design, there should also be new creativity, mud dog shape is abstract, according to the imitation of real objects and then imagine, pay more attention to the expression of imagery and the spiritual world of the language of the conveyance of the modern design, for the visual modeling language of the generalization of the collation is very helpful, you can In modern design, it is very helpful to generalize and organize the visual modeling language, so that we can extract the classic patterns from the modeling language of “Mud Dog” to achieve wide dissemination, and the medium of dissemination will not be limited to achieve better dissemination effects. However, it should be noted that the pattern language and modeling language of “mud dog”, which represent the deep cultural connotation, should be preserved, so as to retain its connotation.

6. Conclusions

New materials can also play a role in the production process of “mud dog”. From the beginning of the birth of “mud dog”, the raw materials used are yellow rubber clay from the vicinity of Huaiyang, and perhaps in the production process, materials that are not subject to regional restrictions such as clay can be used in the production of “mud dog”. Perhaps during the production process, materials that are not subject to regional restrictions, such as clay, can be used in “mud dog”, thus breaking through the regional restrictions to achieve the purpose of wider dissemination and production of a wider range of people. Some newer production methods, such as 3D printing technology, may also be introduced, under such technology, the creation becomes more convenient, and the addition of new technology, so that the size, material, shape of the “mud dog” have more possibilities.

Its innovation can have a variety of means and possibilities, the old production methods may have a new breakthrough in the new era, so that “mud dog”, a treasure with rich cultural connotations shine more brightly.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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